

VZCZCXRO2999
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1052/01 1071716
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171716Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2732
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM TELECOM CTR MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001052

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: UNAMI WILL PROPOSE GOI-KRG "TASK FORCE" TO
NEGOTIATE ARAB-KURD ISSUES FOLLOWING RELEASE OF ITS REPORTS
ON DISPUTED INTERNAL BOUNDARIES AREAS

REF: BAGHDAD 1012

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns John Fox; reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) Summary: UNAMI's SRSG de Mistura, accompanied by POLMIN Ford and European representatives, will propose to KRG President Barzani April 17 the establishment of a high level "Task Force" to take concrete actions on Arab-Kurd issues identified in UNAMI's draft reports on Kirkuk and the other disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) areas. Preliminary meetings with other Kurdish officials, including President Talabani and FM Zebari, indicate the Kurds want to see a concrete political process and a transitional administration in Kirkuk leading to a referendum. UNAMI has cautioned that any referendum should be one that confirms a political agreement between GOI and KRG leaders. De Mistura was positively surprised that Maliki welcomed further UNAMI facilitation in his April 12 briefing for the PM. We have heard a similar apparently constructive reaction from senior Maliki advisor Sadiq al-Rikabi. End summary.

12. (C) POLMIN met with SRSG Staffan de Mistura April 16 to receive a read-out of UNAMI's briefings for PM Maliki and President Talabani on their DIBs reports and to discuss strategy for the April 17 presentation to KRG President Barzani. Deputy SRSG Andrew Gilmour and UNAMI officials Peter Bartu, Elpida Rouka, and Adam Hinds participated, as did MNF-I DCG LTGEN Brown, Senior Advisor for the North Vrooman, and Poloff Cassidy. Gilmour and Bartu had met with S/A Vrooman and Cassidy the day before.

- - - - -
Maliki Cautiously Welcoming of UNAMI Efforts
- - - - -

13. (C) De Mistura said he was pleasantly surprised that, in their April 12 meeting, Maliki had given a "green light" to the idea of a political process emerging from release of the UNAMI reports. De Mistura said the UN will take advantage of this, even if it was only a tactical ploy by Maliki to stretch out consideration of DIBs issues until closer to the national elections, when he can campaign as defender against Kurdish ambitions. Although the UN has not shared with any of the parties the full reports, they briefed their four latest suggested options for the future administrative status of Kirkuk. Maliki expressed a preference for Kirkuk to be a standalone region with substantial local autonomy but no ties to the KRG, although he did not entirely reject UNAMI's "dual nexus" proposal for a Kirkuk Region that has administrative ties to both Baghdad and Erbil (surprising de Mistura). Sadiq al-Rikabi, a senior advisor to Maliki who participated in the PM's meeting with UNAMI, echoed his boss' new approach on the need to settle Arab-Kurd disputes, in bilateral discussions with POLMIN.

- - - - -

Talabani Stresses need for Transitional Period Leading to
Kirkuk Referendum

14. (C) De Mistura's April 15 meeting with President Talabani went well enough. Talabani said "there is no daylight" between his position and Barzani's on DIBs. He nevertheless counseled de Mistura on how to manage Barzani, insisting that the reports mention Article 140 and identifying UNAMI's options for Kirkuk as "transitional" arrangements leading to a referendum in 3-5 years. De Mistura commented that it is obvious that Talabani and Barzani are focused on the political consequences of their DIBs positions in the upcoming KRG elections, noting, for example, that Talabani had returned to Suleimaniya in order to have De Mistura brief him in the KRG where he wears his PUK hat as well. He said Talabani welcomed the idea of a small Task Force to negotiate key issues following release of the reports.

UNAMI Asks USG Support for Task Force Proposal to Masoud
Barzani

15. (C) FM Zebari called on de Mistura the evening of April 15 to offer similar advice for the briefing to Masoud Barzani. De Mistura told POLMIN it was a good sign that Zebari did not find the range of UNAMI proposals "outrageous" (a concern of theirs). Zebari counseled de Mistura that the Kurds would be looking for some mention of Article 140 in their reports (it is there, in one of the two proposals for Kirkuk that UNAMI officials see as a less likely outcome but

BAGHDAD 00001052 002 OF 002

that they inserted to "protect the process." To ensure a positive meeting with Barzani, Zebari said it would be important to acknowledge Kurdish suffering, use the word "transitional" to describe its recommendations, acknowledge Sinjar District's "special status" as a homogenous Kurdish-speaking area surrounded by Arab areas, and indicate plans for a concrete follow-on political process. De Mistura was able to reassure Zebari that all of those things would be part of his Friday presentation in Erbil. Zebari also warned de Mistura he should not give the impression of too much consultation with the Turkish government, which the Kurds do not fully trust. De Mistura told us that he thinks Turkey will be an important supporter of the Friends of the DIBS) which will comprise the UN, U.S. and EU.

16. (C) UNAMI officials have spent considerable time strategizing on their own and with us in advance of the briefing to Masoud on April 17. De Mistura told POLMIN he would need vigorous USG support for his pitch to Masoud to empower a senior Kurdish official to negotiate with the GOI on a small task force, potentially only 2-4 people each designated by the Prime Minister and the KRG. POLMIN countered that Sunni Arabs would need to be represented somehow, since the conflicts along the DIBs line (as opposed to the constitutional disputes) are chiefly between Sunni Arabs and Kurds, and the PM would not be able to "deliver them." De Mistura admitted the point, but said the Task Force would have to be very small to have any hope of success and Sunni Arab hardliners like Osama Alnujaifi would have to be excluded (as would Kurdish hardliners). De Mistura believes that Maliki is discomfited by the Alnujaifi brothers, not just because they are former Ba'athists, but because they are his political rivals as defenders of Arabs against the Kurds. UNAMI plans to brief the two VPs and then share the DIBS report with the 3 1 1 on April 22. De Mistura anticipates that these senior leaders will need at least ten days to digest the reports and to offer factual corrections to UNAMI (which does not plan to publish the reports). UNAMI will brief other select audiences (e.g., COR members of relevant committees) and some provincial leaders (in Mosul April 25, in Kirkuk April 30) before the end of the

month.

¶17. (C) Comment: De Mistura seeks to move aggressively to establish a focused, high-level follow-on political process to facilitate real Kurd-Arab negotiations that will survive his departure, but details are still unresolved, partly because there are many interests to accommodate and partly because it is not clear yet what the parties will accept. Consistent with policy guidance from Washington, we are offering robust support to UNAMI's efforts, in close cooperation with MNF-I, and will continue to engage with the UN on what would be most useful. End comment.

BUTENIS